UPDATE

Groups fight myths about gays

Amendment 2 has emotions running high

By **Louis Aguilar**
Gazette Telegraph

They meet daily now, somewhere in Colorado Springs, juggling interview requests from national media and thinking of new ways to convince people in El Paso County that they are not abominations of God.

They are blue-collar and white-collar, retired people and college students, even straight white Christian males. They are the new gay rights activists, driven out of their closets or shaken out of complacency by the passage of Amendment 2.

A record number of people in the Pikes Peak region are working to fight what they contend are myths and stereotypes of homosexuals promoted by Colorado for Family Values, the Springs-based authors of Amendment 2.

"CFV has created its worst nightmare: a vocal and organized gay and lesbian community in its own backyard," said Sam Broomall, a spokesman for Ground Zero, a 2-month-old group that is spearheading the new activism.

But Will Perkins, executive director of Colorado for Family Values, contends the activism confirms what his group has always maintained. "I think all this proves that the amendment really hasn't taken anything away from them. Look, they still have the right to free speech and association. No one has put limits on them."

"We simply don't believe in giving people special rights because of who they have sex with," he said.

Ground Zero estimates about 400 people in El Paso County are actively trying to combat anti-gay attitudes now. Only about 50 people fought with that kind of fervor against passage of the amendment in the county before the Nov. 3 election.

They've stood before church congregations to say they are not deviants. They've endured near-freezing temperatures to hold candlelight vigils. They've gone on Christian radio to debate Amendment 2 supporters. Saturday, about 130 of them protested what they consider an insensitive editorial stance by the Gazette Telegraph.

Some portion of the gay and lesbian community and their supporters meet daily to plan new strategies to get to the public. They want to educate people about what it's like to be gay and how they believe Amendment 2 jeopardizes their basic constitutional rights.

The amendment bans laws that protect gays, lesbians and bisexuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation. Critics charge that it sanctions gay bigotry. Supporters contend it prevents special rights for gays and puts Colorado civil rights laws on par with federal guidelines.

"Many people thought it wouldn't pass. But now that it has, people see it is a challenge — something to be taken on and conquered," said Robin Miller, a Colorado Springs attorney and lesbian activist who campaigned against Amendment 2. Before the election, "many gays and lesbians didn't actively fight against it in Colorado Springs because it's tough to be characterized as gay and lesbian activist in such a conservative town. . . . I'm really proud of

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Jerilee Bennett/Gazette Telegraph

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Amendment 2 repercussions on gays' insurance questioned

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"All other issues aside, insurance is still the wild card out there," said Cindy Cornelius, spokeswoman for the Colorado AIDS Project. "I worry about how insurance companies make their decisions. Let's face it, these guys are a business."

Jake Gaffigan, a spokesman for the state insurance division, warned against any companies using Amendment 2 as an excuse to dump gay clients. The division is studying the amendment's effect on state law and has requested an opinion from the state attorney general.

Until the lawsuit challenging Amendment 2 on constitutional grounds is settled, companies are still barred from discriminating, Gaffigan said. "As far as we're concerned, any company that does will be taken to a hearing, and the full force of the law will be applied."

The U.S. Supreme Court dealt a blow to gays on insurance issues last week when it decided a self-insured company could cut health benefits to workers who had AIDS.

GT coverage of gay issues called biased

130 march at paper in peaceful protest

By **Robin Rivers**/Gazette Telegraph

About 130 gay rights activists marched outside the Gazette Telegraph on Saturday to protest the paper's editorial- and news-page coverage of gay issues.

Wearing signs that said "I could have AIDS" on their chests and "You could too" on their backs, the group walked and chanted for 90 minutes without incident.

The protest, organized by Ground Zero, a Colorado Springs gay and lesbian activist group, was sparked by a Jan. 26 editorial cartoon opposing lifting the ban on gays in the military. The cartoon showed a skeleton in soldier fatigues marching with gay soldiers. The figure's name tag said "AIDS."

Demonstrator Cindy Bee called the cartoon "sub-human."

"The insinuation that gays, upon lifting the ban, would introduce tainted blood into the military . . . is outrageous," she said. "It's worth noting that the tainted blood issue recalls Nazi propaganda."

Jon Stepleton, editor of the Gazette Telegraph, said in a written statement that the paper "respects the rights of Ground Zero and its supporters to protest our editorial position on gays in the military."

"The cartoon echoed concerns expressed in the halls of Congress and the Pentagon and on the streets of America that AIDS will become a bigger issue for the military to manage if the ban on gays is lifted. Clearly it is a question that needs to be fully addressed," said Stepleton.

Ground Zero spokesman Bruce Loeffler criticized the paper's editorial pages for a lack of diversity of opinion.

Jerilee Bennett/Gazette Telegraph

Protesters fly the "gay nation" and American flags at a demonstration Saturday outside the Gazette Telegraph. About 130 gay rights activists turned out for the event that was spurred in part by an editorial cartoon depicting a skeleton with AIDS marching with gay soldiers. One of the marchers called the cartoon "sub-human." The newspaper's editor, Jon Stepleton, responded that allegations that the Gazette was biased were unfair.

"The editorial page should bring out opposing and different points of view. The Gazette Telegraph does not," said Loeffler, a professor at Colorado College.

Several speakers at the protest said the cartoon was just the latest in what they consider insensitive and inaccurate portrayals of homosexuals in the paper. And they charged that news coverage of two recent stories — the furor over Amendment 2 and the issue of gays in the military — has been biased against their cause.

Stepleton said that contention is unfair.

"Our reporters and editors have worked diligently to cover both sides of this highly emotional story completely and fairly. By most measures, I believe we have succeeded," he said.

"I find it interesting that we also have been criticized widely by supporters of Amendment 2 for what they see as our chronic promotion of the gay agenda on our news pages."

Loeffler said the protest is the beginning of stepped up action against people and organizations that support Amendment 2.

Four members of BACKOFF Colorado showed up to hold a counterprotest, waving an American flag a short distance down the street from the demonstrators.

"We just want to tell people that there is another side to this story," said BACKOFF founder Joseph Nee.

The group has targeted cities, groups and celebrities who endorse the boycott of Colorado over passage of Amendment 2. Nee said BACKOFF is stepping up its efforts to counter-protest at gay rights demonstrations.

"We are going to stick with them," he said.

Gazette Telegraph reporter Louis Aguilar contributed to this report.

distorted or bigoted. "We are not trying to say they all act like that," he said.

Although gays say they're dogged by inaccuracies about who they are, they don't think most people in Colorado Springs are particularly anti-gay, even though El Paso County voted 2-1 in favor of the amendment. Some have even come to the defense of the city and Colorado, backlash has tempered his academic freedom. The foreign language professor has done a great deal of research on gay Latino writers, a subject he now tends to ignore in the classroom.

"I'm much more sensitive about what I would choose. I wouldn't use some material that I would have in past because I'm afraid the class would break down into an argument about homosexuality," he said.

unlikely places. About a third of the calls Ground Zero receives are from gay-rights supporters wanting to know about its outreach to churches.

"I guess that's a surprise to a lot of people, but it shouldn't be," said Alan Cook, who heads that program for Ground Zero. "Gays and lesbians live in Colorado Springs for the same reason everyone else does. They like the

Unitarian and Methodist congregations and is trying to go to 15 more churches of various denominations. But he has been rebuffed more often than invited.

He remains undeterred.

"This is a long-term goal. I realize that many people have to overcome a lot of misunderstandings to accept us, and that takes time," he said.

"But one real goal has already

target of boycott

New York group aims at businesses

Associated Press

BOULDER — The boycott of Colorado to protest Amendment 2 has primarily focused on tourism and convention business, but organizers say they are broadening their efforts to target products manufactured in Colorado.

Boulder-based Celestial Seasonings reportedly will be the first target of New York activists who plan to dump the company's tea into the East River in what they are calling a "New York Tea Party."

The activists, who call themselves New York Boycott Colorado, also are calling on City Hall allies to block the Transit Authority from considering millions of dollars in purchases from the Lamar-based busmaker, Neoplan.

"It's our concern that Colorado companies not do good business in New York City," said Chip Duckett, a leader of the New York boycott.

Colorado officials are criticizing the moves, saying the state's businesses aren't to blame for Amendment 2.

"It's totally unfair," said Celestial Seasonings founder and chief executive Mo Siegel. The company has a nondiscrimination policy on homosexuality and has been a good corporate citizen of the state for decades, Siegel said. "We believe that we're not a prejudiced company."

But boycott supporters say their efforts are warranted since Celestial Seasonings and other companies pay taxes to the state of Colorado, which now is defending Amendment 2 in court.

"I have a lot of respect personally for Celestial Seasonings, but I will dump the four boxes I've got into New York Harbor," Duckett said. "I personally don't want one penny of what I spend going to support this amendment."

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Monus' testimony was his first significant public statement since Phar-Mor fired him. But it shed little light on what happened there. Indeed, when a Rockies lawyer asked why he was removed from Phar-Mor, Monus' lawyer advised his client not to answer the question because his response could be incriminating.

Monus mostly talked about his close working relationship with Antonucci in the past and his interest in shaping the Rockies salary structure. "We started talking about player development since the day after we won the franchise," Monus said.

Rockies lawyer Carl Eklund of Denver portrayed Monus' argument as a self-serving ploy to get "leverage" in his suit against the team. "The harm to Mr. Monus is not irreparable," Eklund said. "It may be to his ego. It may be to his feelings. But it's not irreparable."

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